

- (2) The second quality refers to the Dharma being **free of 'the two'**. Here 'the two' are contaminated karma and afflictions.
- (3) The third quality is that the Dharma is **free of the conceptual awareness** of the improper conceptual mental engagement (Tib.: *tshul min yid byed kyī rnam rtog*). The improper conceptual mental engagement is a mind that grasps at true existence; it precedes afflictions and perceives an object to be truly pleasant, truly unpleasant, or truly neutral.
- (4) The fourth quality of the Dharma is that **it is pure** because its nature is free of defilements.
- (5) The fifth quality refers to the Dharma being **luminous**, for it is luminous with respect to the variety of phenomena (conventional truths) and their mode of existence (ultimate truths).
- (6) The sixth quality is that the Dharma is **the aspect of an antidote**, i.e. it is an antidote because it possesses the ability to eliminate objects of abandonment.
- (7) The seventh quality is the quality of the truth of cessation, for the Dharma **is imbued with the very characteristic of the two truths**, i.e. the truth of cessation and the truth of the path. This means that the Dharma is either a *truth of cessation* or a *truth of the path*. A *truth of cessation* in turn **is that which is free from attachment**. The first three qualities are subsumed under the seventh quality because they are characteristics of the truth of cessation.
- (8) The eighth quality is the quality of the truth of the path. The truth of the path **is that which frees from attachment**. The fourth, fifth, and sixth quality are subsumed under the eighth quality because they are qualities of the truth of the path.

Maitreya says in his *Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)*:

*Freedom from attachment consists of cessations
And truths of the path.
Accordingly these should also
Be known by three qualities each.*

An analogy for the truth of the path is the sun, for the sun is naturally "purified" of darkness. Its rays produce luminosity and it eliminates darkness in different places.

Maitreya says in his *Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)*:

Pure and so forth, these three are like the sun.

Therefore, the Dharma Jewel can be categorized into two:

- I. The truth of cessation
- II. The truth of the path

3. The nature (meaning) of the Sangha Jewel

The nature (meaning) of the Sangha Jewel is: an Arya being who possesses any of the eight qualities, such as knowledge, release, and so forth.

Maitreya says in his *Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)*:

*Since they have pure perception of
The mode of existence, of the varieties, and of the inner wisdom,
And since they are wise, the Assembly who never regresses
Has unsurpassable qualities.*

The eight qualities of the Sangha Jewel are:

- (1) The first quality is that the Sangha Jewel has **pure perception of the ultimate mode of existence** (ultimate truth) of phenomena by way of self-originated awareness
- (2) The second quality is that the Sangha Jewel has **pure perception of the varieties** of phenomena (conventional truth) by way of self-originated awareness
- (3) The third quality is that the Sangha Jewel has **pure direct perception of the inner wisdom**, i.e. the Tatagathagarbha or Buddha nature, of sentient beings.

- (4) The fourth quality of the Sangha Jewel is of being free from obstructions of attachment (Tib.: *chags pa'i sgrib pa*). Obstructions of attachment are afflictive obstructions.
- (5) The fifth quality of the Sangha Jewel is of being free from obstructions of obscurity (Tib.: *thogs pa'i sgrib pa*). Obstructions of obscurity are cognitive obscurations.
- (6) The sixth quality is of the Sangha Jewel being free of common obstructions (Tib.: *dman pa'i sgrib pa*). There are two interpretations as to what common obstructions refer to. Some scholars say that common obstructions refer to the mind that aspires to merely attain self-liberation. This type of mind, even though extremely precious and difficult to cultivate, is considered to be an obstruction to generating Bodhicitta. Other scholars say that common obstructions refer to obstructions to meditative stabilization.
Obstructions to meditative stabilization prevent mental factors of concentration to remain single-pointedly focused on their particular objects.
Having overcome any of these obscurations, **the Assembly**, i.e. the Sangha Jewel, **who never regresses** from their attainments, is considered **wise**. The Sangha Jewel never regresses from their attainments because they have reached the path of seeing, the path of meditation, or the path of no-more-learning.
- (7) The seventh quality of the Sangha Jewel is knowledge. The first three qualities are subsumed under the seventh quality.
- (8) The eighth quality is release. The fourth, fifth, and sixth quality are subsumed under the eighth quality, for these three refer to the release or elimination of different obstructions.

Being thus endowed with the eight qualities, the Sangha Jewel **has unsurpassable qualities**.

3. The difference between a conventional and an ultimate refuge

- I. The meaning of an ultimate refuge is: an object of refuge that is genuinely final.
Examples for ultimate objects of refuge are the two Rupakayas of the Buddha. They are genuinely final objects of refuge because they are the highest possible achievement and thus final.
- II. The meaning of a conventional refuge is: an object of refuge that is not genuinely final.
Examples for conventional objects of refuge are Hearer and Solitary Realizer Arhats.

Gyalsab je explains in his *Commentary on the Uttaratantra* that even though from the perspective of some Buddhist philosophers Hearer and Solitary Realizer Arhats are final attainments, in actuality they are not final. They are not final attainments because these Arhats will eventually attain the state of a Buddha.

This also explains why such objects of refuge are 'conventional' or 'deceptive' refuges. For instance, conventional truths such as people, cars, etc. are 'conventional' or 'deceptive' truths because even though they are empty of existing ultimately/truly, to sentient beings' awarenesses they appear to exist ultimately/truly. Likewise objects of refuge such as Hearer and Solitary Realizer Arhats are 'conventional' or 'deceptive' refuges because even though in actuality they are merely temporary attainments, from the perspective of some Buddhist philosophers they are final attainments.

The philosophers from whose perspective Hearer and Solitary Realizer Arhats are final attainments are the proponents of the Vaibashika School, the Sautantrika School Following Scripture, and the Chittamatra School Following Scripture. The reason for their assertion is that they accept three *final* vehicles. According to them, most beings who have reached the states of Hearer or Solitary Realizer Arhats do not continue to practice in order to become Buddhas. Indeed upon their death the mental and physical continua of these Arhats are severed and they cease to exist. Therefore, there are only very few Buddhas who after having attained enlightenment teach others the methods to self-liberation or Buddhahood. However, when these Buddhas pass away their mental and physical continua are also severed and they go out of existence.

According to the other tenet schools (the Sautantrika Following Reason, the Chittamatra Following Reason, and the Madhyamika tenets) there are three *temporary* vehicles, but there is only one *final* vehicle. This means that everyone will eventually attain enlightenment and become a Buddha even if they first become Hearer or Solitary Realizer Arhats. It is accepted that after their death these Arhats form a new physical body through pure wishes and meditative powers, and enter the Mahayana path.

